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SUBJECT: LEBANON: PRESIDENT SLEIMAN: DAY FOUR OF HIS
PRESIDENCY

REF: BEIRUT 758

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) In a May 29 meeting, new President Sleiman acknowledged that he believed Lebanon would have to accept the results of democracy and elections. A national consensus would be necessary in order for him to govern effectively, he stated. Responding to the invitation extended by POTUS during their May 26 telecon, Sleiman raised the idea of a visit to Washington around the time of the UN General Assembly in September. Sleiman told us that he looks forward to addressing the many difficult challenges in Lebanon, drawing on several books that he has found useful. End Summary.

SLEIMAN VISION;
MESSAGE FROM NASRALLAH

2. (C) Charge, accompanied by DCM and Defense Attache, met with President Michel Sleiman at the Presidential Palace in Baabda. Charge congratulated Sleiman on his election and his inaugural address saying, "it was well received, balanced, and we look forward to seeing the vision you outlined in your speech implemented." Sleiman told Charge that he would commit his presidency to achieving the goals he outlined. The U.S. would continue to support Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, and democracy, Charge noted. Sleiman's appeal for national unity on Sunday had been appreciated, as had his focus on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, independence of the judiciary, and economic and security stability. The role of the state and the need for the armed forces to safeguard democracy were also important items in this vision statement. In a nod to the difficulty of these tasks, Sleiman said, "maybe I will not reach all of my objectives, but we must start by approaching all of these objectives." He sidestepped a question on his inaugural speech's mention of the role of the resistance.

3. (C) Charge noted that Hizballah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah's May 26 speech had seemed to be made in response to Sleiman's address to the Parliament the day before. Nasrallah had contacted him after his Sunday oath-taking, Sleiman said, but had said nothing about the speech.

Instead, Nasrallah had focused on telling Sleiman that Sleiman was the "consensus candidate to the Presidency." "Maybe we will have some problems because it was a balanced speech," Sleiman commented.

I WILL NOT TRAVEL SOON;
MUCH TO DO HERE IN LEBANON

¶4. (C) Although it had been reported in the local media that President Sleiman would travel soon to Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Syria, the President told us that his travel plans are very preliminary, with nothing yet on the calendar. He does intend to travel to the Arab states, but he envisions these as being very short trips, "maybe a one or two day maximum."

¶5. (C) Sleiman raised the idea of going to the U.S. in September for the UN General Assembly, suggesting this might be a good time for seeing USG officials in Washington, as well. He was very pleased by the invitation to Washington extended by POTUS during their May 26 telephone call. (Note: The German Foreign Minister and the French President are due to travel to Beirut in the coming week, we understand. End note.)

SLEIMAN'S READING LIST -----

¶6. (C) "You have to accept the results of democracy and the elections," said Sleiman. President Sleiman re-emphasized the

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need for national consensus in Lebanon in order to govern effectively. He acknowledged that Cabinet formation was now in the hands of PM Siniara and the political groupings, and acknowledged the "name game" going on in Beirut at present. Sleiman said that he looked forward to the visit of USDP Edelman later in the week. He expressed gratitude for the USG's continued programs to train and equip the Lebanese Armed Forces. The U.S. commitment to supporting Lebanon would remain firm, emphasized Charge, including robust economic and security assistance programs.

¶7. (C) Toward the end of a very friendly and relaxed meeting, Sleiman commented that his vision for the government was outlined in his inaugural speech. He then told us that several books were of significance to him. The first work he cited was Don Miguel Ruiz's "The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom." Sleiman said he had, in fact, used the first of the book's "agreements," "be impeccable with your word," when formulating the inaugural speech. He had vowed to serve Lebanon in his address and would strive to carry out each of the goals listed. He said he hoped to apply the other "agreements" of not taking anything personally, not making assumptions, and always doing your best as mantras for his administration.

¶8. (C) Sleiman told us he also admires the books "Who Moved My Cheese? (An Amazing Way to Deal with Change in Your Work and in Your Life)" and "Animal Farm", citing "Animal Farm" as an example of how to foment revolution within a regime. "But you have to do more than read. You have to apply the lessons," he declared, "and you have to implement them."

¶9. (C) Sleiman said he still has much to do in order to put the affairs of the office of the Presidency in order. He has been able to quickly put into place his military team at the palace, but that it will take a little longer to identify and seat a team of civilian advisors. (We noted that his previous chief of security while he was the LAF Commander, Colonel Wadie Ghafari, has taken over palace Republican Guard operations. The previous chief of intelligence at Beirut Airport, Colonel Bassam Boutrous, is now serving as Chief of the Military Room at the Palace. Also present at Baabda was Major Fayez Mashmoushi, former Deputy LAF G-2 Intelligence

Officer in the Strategic Relations department. Mashmoushi is now the commander for the close protection detail of President Sleiman.)

CREDENTIALS FOR LEBANESE CHARGE IN WASHINGTON

¶10. (C) Sleiman said he would discuss with caretaker FM Salloukh on May 29 completing the credentials for the current Lebanese Charge d'Affaires in Washington, Antoine Chedid, so that Chedid could be included in the upcoming White House credentials ceremony on June 6.

COMMENT

¶11. (C) On his fourth full day on the job, Sleiman was at ease, comfortable in his new office and displayed a presidential air of confidence. Sleiman emphasized that he is open to working with everyone and will continue to forge consensus. Although he came to office as a consensus candidate, Sleiman has no grassroots political support base of his own. All eyes are now upon him as he considers which three cabinet ministers he will name; the likelihood of a Sleiman-nominated Minister of Interior continues to be widely discussed.

¶12. (C) Charge responded to journalist's questions at Baabda Palace following the meeting, focusing on the USG's desire to pursue common values of freedom, sovereignty, and democracy. She also noted the goals of political reconciliation, economic progress, and our commitment to a strong and modern Lebanese Armed Force. End Comment.

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